The Fire and the Fuel

Sermon 19: A Deconstruction of Nibbana and the Cessation of Existence

The Central Inquiry: What happens to the fire when the fuel is gone? This deck explores Sermon 19, refuting the notion of Nibbana as an "eternal place" or "destination." We examine the concept of extinguishment—the cessation of the conditions that fuel existence.

Based on the teachings of Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇananda & Bhikkhu Analayo.

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Dependence and Extinguishment

The Analogy

An oil lamp burns depending on oil and a wick. If fuel is not added, the flame is extinguished.

The Insight

Nibbana is not a location one travels to; it is the result of removing the fuel. The “fuel” is craving (*Tanha*) and grasping (*Upadana*). When these are removed, the process of becoming simply ceases. The flame does not go to a “place.” It simply goes out.

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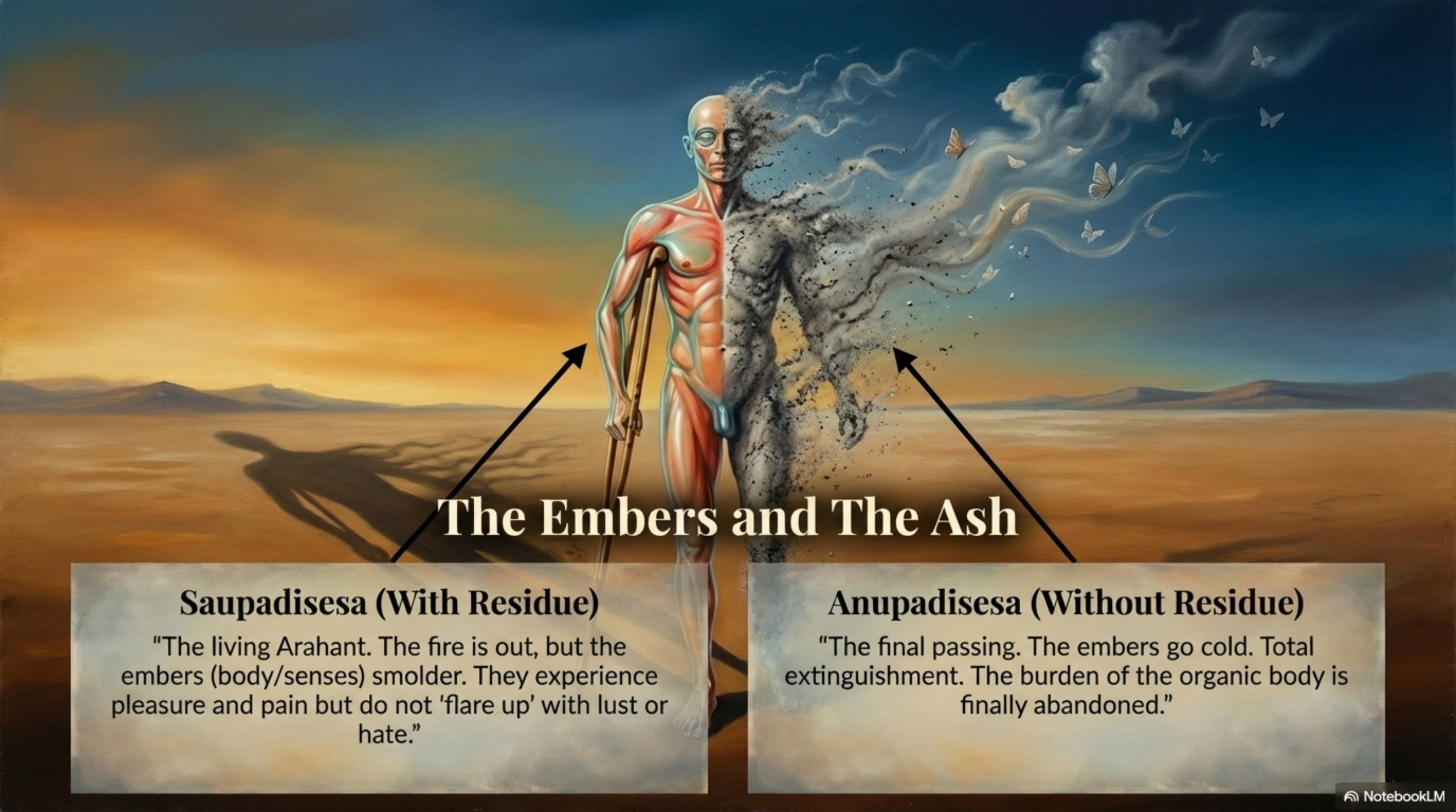
The Embers and The Ash
Saupadisesa (With Residue)
"The living Arahant. The fire is out, but the embers (body/senses) smolder. They experience pleasure and pain but do not 'flare up' with lust or hate."
Anupadisesa (Without Residue)
"The final passing. The embers go cold. Total extinguishment. The burden of the organic body is finally abandoned."
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The Certainty of the Cool

Realization Here and Now

The Arahant does not need to wait for death to know the outcome.

The Formula

"All that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool."

The Assurance

Because craving for fresh existence is extirpated *now*, the Arahant knows with certainty that there is no fuel for a future fire.
Quote: "Gone cool. My heart is extinguished."

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When Faith Becomes Redundant

General Siha asks the Buddha about the visible fruits of giving.

Visible Fruits: Siha accepts earthly benefits (fame, confidence) because he experiences them directly—like the jewels in the drawers.

The Hereafter: He accepts the promise of heavenly rebirth only on faith ('I do not know this')—like the clouds above.

The Insight: For the Arahant, Nibbana is like the visible fruit. It is known, not believed. Where there is knowledge born of experience, faith is redundant.

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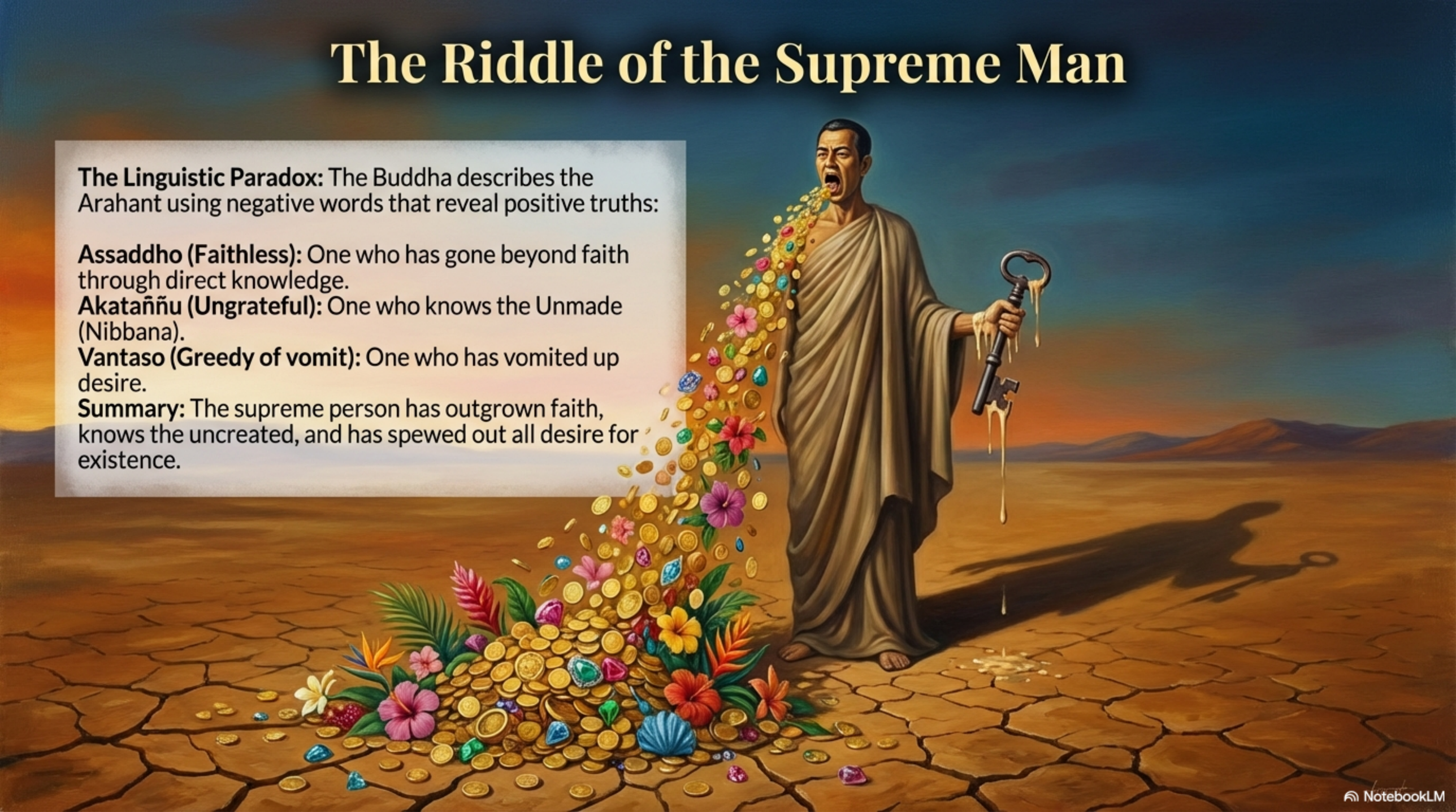
The Riddle of the Supreme Man

The Linguistic Paradox: The Buddha describes the Arahant using negative words that reveal positive truths:

Assaddho (Faithless): One who has gone beyond faith through direct knowledge.
Akataññu (Ungrateful): One who knows the Unmade (Nibbana).
Vantaso (Greedy of vomit): One who has vomited up desire.
Summary: The supreme person has outgrown faith, knows the uncreated, and has spewed out all desire for existence.



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The Eternalist Trap

The Parable of the Fish & Tortoise: A fish asks a tortoise what “dry land” is like. Is it wet? No. Is it bubbly? No. The fish concludes land does not exist exist because it cannot be described in aquatic terms.

The Warning: Just because Nibbana is described negatively (no earth, no water, no pain), does not mean it is “nothingness.” Nor is it a magical place.

The Reality: It is simply the cessation of the conditions of suffering, which cannot be described using the vocabulary of “existence”.

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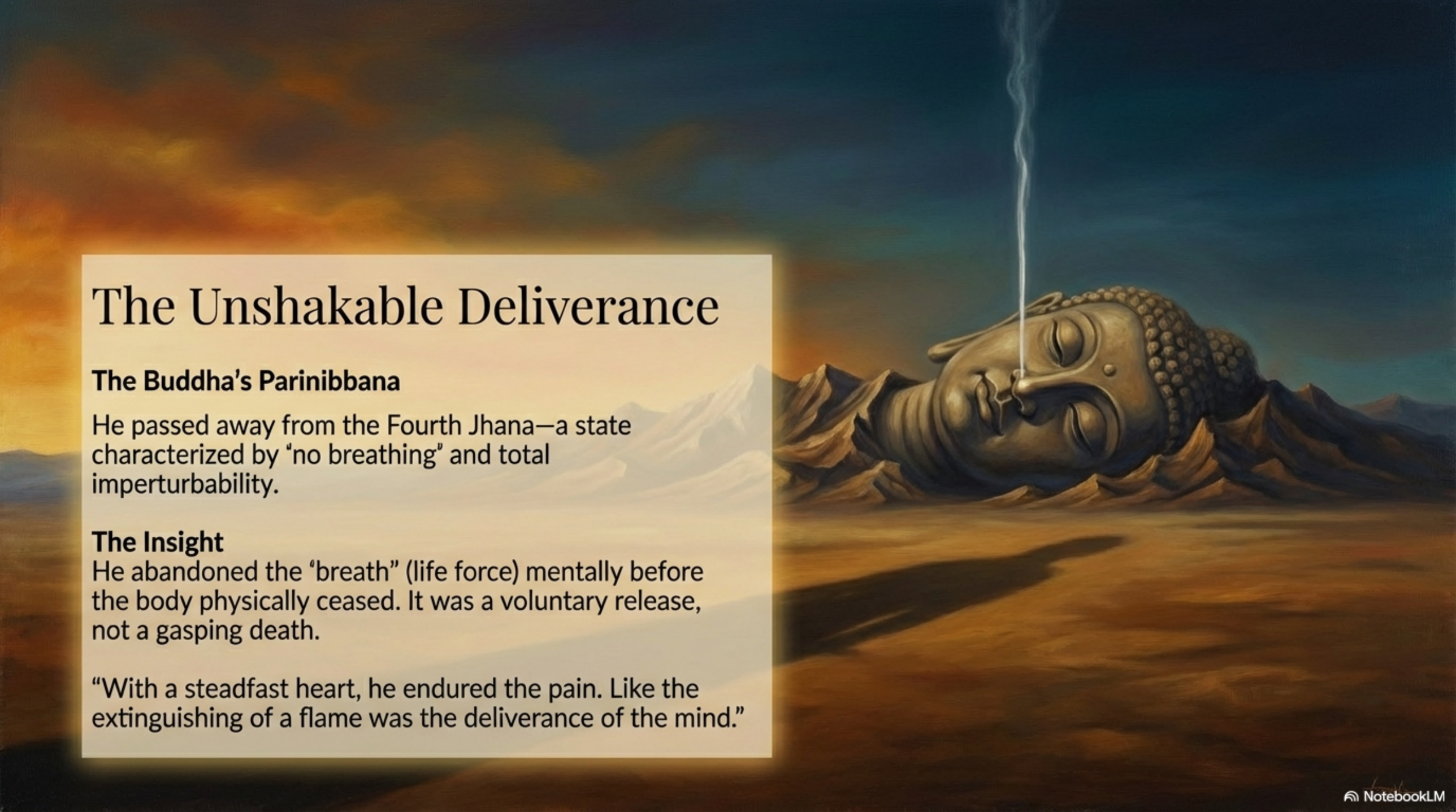

The Unshakable Deliverance

The Buddha's Parinibbana

He passed away from the Fourth Jhana—a state characterized by "no breathing" and total imperturbability.

The Insight

He abandoned the "breath" (life force) mentally before the body physically ceased. It was a voluntary release, not a gasping death.

"With a steadfast heart, he endured the pain. Like the extinguishing of a flame was the deliverance of the mind."

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The Ashless Fire

The Story of Dabba Mallaputta
Dabba rose into the air and self-cremated through meditative power, leaving neither ash nor soot.

The Metaphor
“Just as in the case of a fire… no path it goes by can be traced.”

The Meaning
This is a visual representation of Anupadisesa. The enlightened being leaves no "spiritual ash"—no seed for rebirth, no trace by which Mara (death) can follow them.

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Metaphor vs. Instruction

The Danger of Literalism
Taking metaphors literally (like ‘burning’) has led to historical misunderstandings, such as self-immolation practices.

The Correction
The ‘burning’ refers to the *mental* extinguishment of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion.

The Practice
It is the psychological removal of fuel, not the destruction of the physical body, that leads to liberation.

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The Floral Design

Sankhata (The Prepared)
‘Existence is like a ‘prepared floral design,’ not a natural unity.’

The Adhesives
The design is held together by the **Glue of Craving**, the **Tangles of Views**, and the **Knots of Conceit**.

The Solution
Remove the glue. Untie the knots. The design dissolves into the *Asankhata* (The Unprepared). There is no ‘self’ destroyed, only a construction dismantled.

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The Hither and Farther Shore

The Lotus Leaf Paradox

‘We perceive a vast gap between ‘here’ (Samsara) and ‘there’ (Nibbana). But the gap is like the distance between a lotus leaf and the water drop sitting on it.’

‘Nibbana is realized *here*, simply by not clinging to ***this***. It is a shift in contact, not a change in location.’

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Cessation, Not Annihilation

The View

Nibbana is the cessation of the ***process*** of suffering. It is not the destruction of a “being,” because there was no permanent self to begin with.

The Analogy

It is the end of a fever. When a fever breaks, the health does not “go” somewhere; the illness simply ceases.

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The Fire Goes Nowhere

An extinguished fire goes nowhere.

The Arahant is “trace-less.” They cannot be located by Mara, by gods, or by men. This is the ultimate peace: freedom from the burden of becoming. The floral design is unglued. The fire is out.

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Sources & Context

Based on Sermon 19

“By Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇananda.”

Commentary

“Comparative study by Bhikkhu Analayo.”

Production

“Collaborative course: Numata Center for Buddhist Studies & Barre Center for Buddhist Studies.”

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